

*The Delay of Success to repeated Fasts
consider'd and apply'd.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
Univerfity of OXFORD,
At St. MARY's,

On Wednesday, January 9. 1744-5.

Being the Sixth General FAST

Appointed to be kept

On Occafion of the WAR.

By GEORGE FOTHERGILL, B.D. Fellow
of Queen's College, now Principal of
St. Edmund Hall.

The Second Edition.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE for RICHARD CLE-
MENTS; and Sold by J. and J. RIVINGTON
in St. Paul's Church-Yard, London; W. THUR-
BOURNE at Cambridge; and J. LEAKE in Bath.

M DCC LIII.

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considered and applied.

SEERMON

Imprimatur,

EUS. ISHAM,

Vice-Can. OXON.

Jan. 23. 1744-5.



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MDCCLIII.

from the Law of God, many abundant

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ISAIAH LVIII. 3. part I.

*Wherefore have we fasted (say they) and
Thou seeest not? Wherefore have we
afflicted our Soul, and Thou takest no
Knowledge?*

SCARCE any Thing appear'd more early,
or has all along been more distinguisha-
ble, in the Nature of fallen Man, than
a certain *Reluctance*, which he discovers
upon almost every Occasion of Disappointment
or Uneasiness, against acknowledging or even sus-
pecting the Cause to be within himself. Nor is
this observable only in *single Persons*, but often
in *Parties*, and sometimes in whole *Communities*,
of Men. In the *Glory* of any Publick Successes
they can be very well contented to take their
Share: But, when Affairs are less prosperous,
we find them equally disposed to renounce all
Pretensions to the *Blame*; little solicitous where
that may rest, provided it be not brought *home*
to themselves.

The Passage before us will, I think, furnish
us with a remarkable Instance of what is here
observed. — From several Parts of this sublime
Prophecy it appears, that the *Jewish People* were
at this Time chargeable with many gross Devia-

tions from the Law of GOD, many abominable Corruptions both in Principle and Practice. Accordingly the Prophet is here order'd to *'cry aloud and not spare; to shew the People their Transgression, and the House of Jacob their Sin.* Such Information, one would imagine, might have been but little wanted in their Circumstances. And yet, it seems, all this while, as if their Behaviour had been in every respect irreproachable, they cou'd be very assiduous in performing the outward Acts of Devotion, and even familiar with their Maker in their Expressions of it. *They seek me daily (saith GOD) and delight to know my Ways; as a Nation that did Righteousness, and forsook not the Ordinance of GOD; they ask of me the Ordinances of Justice, they take Delight in approaching to GOD.* Nay, so insensible were they of their own Degeneracy, or so very little acquainted with GOD's Perfections, as to be at a Loss to account for the Unsuccessfulness of their former Addresses, and almost ready to ascribe it to a Want either of Power or Goodness in the Deity. *Wherefore have we fasted, said they, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our Soul, and Thou takest no Knowledge?* — Strange! that *'a sinful Nation, a People laden with Iniquity, a Seed of Evil-Doers, Children that were Corrupters,* shou'd want an Answer to this Question! — Let us, however, suspend our Admiration till we have reflected a little, whether ourselves may not be in some degree concerned in the foregoing Observation.

We of this Nation have already *five several Times* presented ourselves before Almighty God; deprecating His Judgments of which we were justly afraid, and imploring His Blessing on the Counsels and Arms of our Sovereign: And, in order to do this with the greater Solemnity and the more Success, we have (in Conformity with the pious Injunction of our Superiours, and with the Practice of the Church of God in all Ages) joyn'd *Fasting* with our *Prayers* on these Occasions. Of what Efficacy all this may have been, it becomes not us to pronounce. But, without attempting any Comparison of our present Situation with that we were in at the Commencement of the War, or specifying any Events that have occur'd in the Progress of it; without desiring to rob God of the Glory of any of our Successes, or those brave *Men, that have hazarded their Lives unto the Death*, of our due Thanks for any seasonable Deliverances or unexpected Advantages, which by His Blessing they have gain'd for us; I presume, the Appointment of this *Sixth Day of Humiliation* will justify a Supposal, because it implies an Acknowledgment, that our former Fasts have *not yet* procured for us *all* those favourable Returns from Heaven, which we desired and hoped for from them. And what now is the Use we make of this? In Justice to our Governours indeed, it should be remember'd, that they have in this very Appointment suggested the Consideration, which ought always to be uppermost in our Thoughts on this Subject. But, is this *in fact* the View wherin we are most apt to

to consider these Things? A little Conversation with Men full of *Political Schemes* will convince us of the Contrary. Talk, for instance, with *Many* of these; and You will hear much of the Perfidiousness of some Neighbouring Powers, and the Inactivity and unseasonable Delays of others; of the Insufficiency of Treaties in some former Reigns; and of the Encouragement given to our Enemies abroad by our Factions at home. Talk again with *Others*; and You will find our Misfortunes first greatly aggravated, and then ascribed *intirely* to the Mismanagement of Publick Affairs; and to the Weakness or the Wickedness of Persons entrusted with the Direction of them. And, as to particular Enterprizes; when Men have charged the Failure of our sanguine Expectations to the Impetuosity of one Leader, or the Inexperience of another, perhaps the Unfaithfulness of a third, and the Want of a due Harmony between the principal Conductors in them all; they think they have given a *full* Solution of the respective Cases, and trouble not themselves with looking any *farther*: Thus widely differing in their *particular* Accounts; but All agreeing to *clear themselves* of any Share in the Blame; and Most (I fear) *so far* varying from the Pattern in my Text, as to leave God and *Providence* quite out of their Calculations.

My Design in saying thus much is not (You will easily believe) to enter farther into Particulars little deserving your Attention on this *pious* Occasion. What I wou'd observe upon the whole is; that, in resting these Matters where we com-

monly do, our Enquiries end where they ought only to begin. Be the Faults on all Sides for the present supposed as great as even Party-*Veberence* can represent them; yet the Reflections, in which we are most nearly interested, remain still to be made. For (to use the Words of Holy *Job*) *Who knoweth not in all these, that the Hand of the LORD hath wrought this?* The Folly, but especially the Wickedness, of Men must indeed be charged to their own Hearts: But they cannot, either of them, operate farther or otherwise than God gives them Leave: To His Permission therefore, if not Direction, we should always refer the Effects they produce, and then attentively consider, what Instruction He intends to convey to us by them. This is the Light in which the inspired ⁹ Writers constantly teach us to consider Cases of this Kind. But we need go no farther than to the following very apposite Passage of our Prophet *Isaiah*: *Who gave Jacob to the Spoil, and Israel to the Robbers? Did not the LORD, He against whom they had sinned? For they did not walk in His Way, neither were they obedient unto His Law. Therefore He hath poured upon him the Fury of His Anger, and the Strength of Battle; and it hath set him on Fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it hath burned him, yet he laid it not to Heart.* In which Words every People or Nation encompass'd with the Dangers and exposed to the Ravages of War, may distinctly read, *By whose Appointment it is that they find*

^a Job XII. 9. ^b See in particular 2 Sam. XVI. 11. Prov. XVI. 4. *Isaiah* XLV. 7. Amos III. 6. ^c *Isai.* XLII. 24, 25. them.

themselves in such a Situation; *What has been the meritorious Cause of it on their Part; and What Kind of Behaviour every such Dispensation demands from them.* — They are to *lay it to Heart*: that is, to make serious Reflections upon it, and suitable Applications to themselves from it. And, if to their other Preparations against the Dangers of their Country they have heretofore added solemn Addresses to Almighty God, they may well ask themselves in the Language of my Text (not by Way of familiar Expostulation with their Maker, but of impartial Examination of their own Consciences) *Wherefore have we fasted, and GOD seeth not? Wherefore have we afflicted our Soul, and He taketh no Knowledge?*

This then is the Use which I take Leave to make of these Words. And in order to adapt them to the more immediate Business of the present Solemnity, I shall apply them to *the Case of a Nation after repeated Fasts still engaged in a doubtful and hazardous War*; and shall reduce what I wou'd offer thereupon under the following Heads of Enquiry:

I. *First, To what Reasons any People thus circumstanced may most probably ascribe the seeming Unsuccessfulness of their former Fasts and Humiliations.*

II. *Secondly, How far We of this Nation have Cause to think ourselves concern'd in any of the Cases specify'd. And, according as we may appear to be so,*

III. *Thirdly,*

III. *Thirdly*, What remains to be *done on our Part*, in order to recommend ourselves more successfully to the Divine Favour and Blessing for the Future.

I. The *First* of these Enquiries must be enter'd upon with some *Caution*. For * *known unto God*, and to Him *only* with *infallible* Certainty, *are all His Works from the Beginning of the World*. The Grounds of God's Proceedings, tho' in all Cases just and right *in themselves*, yet may in many Cases be out of the Reach of our *Discernment*: And whensoever they are so, they afford Matter for implicate Acquiescence, rather than curious Examination, or bold Conjecture.

The Truth is, from the *present visible* Dispensations of Providence towards *Individuals*, or even *Communities*, we cannot *always* form *unerring* Judgments concerning their *real* Situation in respect to the Favour of Heaven. The sacred History affords us more than one Instance of *Success* granted to *sinful Nations*, when the great Disposer of all Events has thought fit to make use of them as *Scourges* for the Chastisement of other sinful Nations, or as *Instruments* in the Accomplishment of some other less discernible Purposes of his Pleasure. However, we more rarely find *Evil brought upon* any Persons, or even *Good withholden from* them, in their *National Capacity*, but for some Cause or other *subsisting on their Part*. And * *when the LORD's Hand is thus lifted up*, He expects, that a Nation shou'd see and

a Acts XV. 18.

b Isai. XXVI. 11.

observe it: When the Reasons of God's Proceedings may with Probability be collected from any Circumstances of the Community concerned; it will always be the Duty of such a Community to enquire into, and attentively consider, them. — To *Reasons* of this Kind I would be understood to *confine* the Enquiry now before us.

And, in this View, the Delay of Success to a Nation's *repeated Fasts* for a Blessing on its Arms may, I think, generally be ascribed to some *Defect* in one or more of these Particulars: — the *Goodness* of the *Cause* wherein they are engaged: — the *Propriety* of the *Means* employ'd in the Prosecution of it: — the *Qualifications* and Circumstances of *such Fasts themselves*: — or, the *Effects* these ought to have had in regard to a suitable *Reformation* of any former Misconduct. — Of each of these briefly, and in the order above-mention'd.

“That there *may be* Occasion given sufficient to justify a Nation, upon Principles of *Reason*, in vindicating its Rights by the Use of Arms; and “that *Christianity* does not deprive Nations *professing its Truth* of those Means of Self-Defence which Reason allows them; are Points which I shall here take for *granted*: Because, tho' they have been, and still continue to be, contested by some; yet have they often, and (I think) unanswerably, been made good by others. But after all, whoever well considers, *What War is*, at the same Time that he judges it *may be* lawful, will allow, that there must always be some *good Cause* to make it *such*. War is a direct

rect Appeal to the Court of Heaven: And surely, Nothing less than a well-grounded Assurance, at least a fair Presumption, of the Justice of their Plea, can give any People reasonable Hopes of a Determination in their Favour from that impartial Tribunal. And, as War is an Appeal of such a Nature, that the Fortunes and Lives of Millions, nay their yet more durable Interests (the Value of which cannot be brought within any of our Computations) must often be very deeply concerned, not only in the *Issue*, but in the very *Prosecution* of it; the *Importance*, as well as the Clearness, of the Rights contended for, must also be a Circumstance always demanding a serious Attention. — That the most ardent Prayers, the most solemn Fasts, can little avail a People unjustly or unnecessarily *going forth to Battle*, I need scarce observe: These can *never change* a bad Cause into a good one; or give to one People *any Right* to the Possessions or the Commerce of another. Nay rather, should a Nation wrongfully, or even rashly, engaging in War, apply for Success to the supreme Arbitrer of Contests of this Kind; such a Proceeding must (according to all our Notions of Things) provoke His Resentment instead of conciliating his Favour: It would be to request His Patronage to Slaughter and Bloodshed, to Injustice and Rapine. And, tho' Providence may, for wise Purposes, often permit Nations, invading the Rights of others, to triumph for a Time in the Possession of *Spoils taken by Violence*: Yet, when any People find their Enterprizes defeat-

ed, and their Humiliations ineffectual; well may *these* appear among their Articles of Enquiry, "Whether the Failure of their Purposes has not been owing to *some Iniquity* in their Cause? And "Whether they have not been *affronting* God's Honour by imploring His *Blessing* upon it?

And the like may be observed in regard to the *Means* to be employ'd in the Prosecution of a just Cause. 'Tis true, *Human Means* should in no Case be solely or chiefly rely'd on: and least of all in this, where it ought to be ever remember'd, that *the Battle is not ours but God's*. So far, however, is an Application of wrong Means, or even a Neglect in applying proper ones, from being on that account justifiable, that it cannot be excusable. The great Governor of the Universe is a *God of Order, and not of Confusion*; and accordingly makes (what we call) *second Causes* usually produce their Effects regularly and *uniformly*: Otherwise Experience and Observation could be of little Use, and Wisdom and Folly would become almost the same Thing. And, tho' the Almighty reserves to Himself a Power of controlling the Motions and Operations of His Creatures whensoever and howsoever He pleases; and, in War particularly, takes frequent Occasions to convince us, that *there is no Restraint to Him to save by many or by few*: Yet the Ground for us to proceed upon, in our Deliberations and Actions, is not, what the Almighty *can* do, but what it is *reasonable* for us to expect He *will* do; and reasonable it cannot be for us

to expect *extraordinary* Interpositions, where the *ordinary Means* which He has put in our Power are neglected or misapply'd. And, if *every Purpose*, in the common Affairs of Life, requires to be *establish'd by Counsel*, more especially should a Nation *with good Advice make War*. The Truth is, where proper Measures are not concerted, much more where unlawful ones are made use of, the most formal Addresses to the Deity would, in Persons conscious of such Mismanagement, be rather Instances of Presumption, than Expressions of Piety. And should any Thing of this Kind *evidently appear* in the Case of a disappointed People; tho', for Reasons already suggested, they ought always to look higher for the *supreme Disposer* of their Affairs, and nearer home for the *original Source* of any unpleasing Circumstances attending them; yet it would be natural for them also to ascribe their Disappointments to that Unskilfulness or Unfaithfulness, as to the *immediate Instrument*, by which they would, on *this Supposition*, be so visibly occasion'd.

But a farther Defect, more suitable to my present Purpose to consider, may be in the *Qualifications* of a People's *Fasts* and Humiliations in *themselves*. This is indeed the Defect principally insisted upon by the Prophet in ^b the Context; which I will not repeat at large, after it has been just read to you. From which Passage, compared with others on the same Subject, we may collect the three following *principal Requisites* of a National Fast, on Occasion of War: — An

a Prov. XX. 18.

b Isai. LVIII. the Lesson for the Day.

unfeigned Humiliation both of Body and Mind; in Opposition to such an Hypocritical Performance of this Duty, as allows of private Indulgences of our sensual Appetites (here called, *Finding Pleasure*) or such as is principally calculated to engage the Observation and *Applause of Men*: — An humble Application for, and *sincere Reliance* upon, the Divine Blessing on the Use of proper Means; in Opposition to a Self-sufficient Confidence and arrogant *Glorying in our own* Might, Policy, or Alliances, &c: — And lastly, an *humane Temper* of Mind toward All, but particularly a Readiness to redress the aggrieved and relieve the distress'd; in Opposition to *Strife and Debate* with Equals, Insolence and Oppression toward Inferiours, and especially an unfeeling Hardness of Heart toward the indigent and afflicted. I need not enlarge upon these Particulars. If Self-Indulgence and Hypocrisy; if Presumption and Confidence in our own Strength; if rigorous Exactions upon the defenceless, and Want of Bowels for the miserable; can be more unseasonable at one Time than at another; *that Time* must be, when we profess to humble ourselves in Dust and Ashes, imploring Pardon for past Sins, and Protection against impending Dangers. — A Fast, attended with all or any of the vitiating Circumstances above-mention'd, can never be *the Fast which GOD has chosen*; nor should a People thus only *afflicting their Soul* be at a Loss to answer, *Wherefore He taketh no Knowledge.*

c Matt. VI. 16, &c.

Espe-

Especially if, in the last Place, their former Humiliations have *also fail'd* of producing a *proper Reformation* of past Transgressions. — “That Impiety and Iniquity, whether in single Persons or in Communities, is *that abominable Thing which God hateth*; and which, whilst unreformed, He will by no means suffer to escape *finally unpunish'd*: “that, tho' Personal Guilt need not, yet National Wickedness must, receive its Punishment in the *present World*: “that therefore National Reformation is necessary to avert National Judgments, and to engage the Favour of the Almighty, especially *when the Host goeth forth against their Enemies*: and “that *This* has appear'd in the *General Course* of Providence thro'out all the Records of former Ages, with which we have any Acquaintance:” — *These* are Particulars, which I must not here stay to illustrate, And surely, the most *solemn Addresses* to the Majesty of Heaven can make no Difference in *Favour* of an *impenitent* People, but rather the contrary; it being a Truth most agreeable to the clearest of our natural Notions, that “God *bear-eth not Sinners*, nay that *the Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination to Him*. Indeed, to imagine, that a few Prayers, or even *Fastings*, should atone for a general Neglect and Violation of God's other righteous Laws, would be to ascribe to *the Judge of all the Earth* such a Degree of Unconcernedness for his own Honour and Authority, as we should call by *any Name* rather than that of *Goodness* in a Man like ourselves.

a Joh. IX. 31.

b Prov. XV. 8.

However, God's People of old having been surprisingly fond of this delusive Persuasion, we have His express Declarations, by their *Prophets and Righteous Men*, upon this very Point, *written for our Learning*. And well may Nations in general by these be *admonished*, if at any Time the Blessings they have been earnestly requesting are *turned away, and good Things withheld from them*, that such Delays are to be charged, not to any Failure on God's Part, but to *Something amiss* on their own: That *vain* will their most costly and painful Services always be, if not accompany'd with *inward Piety and uniform Holiness of Life*: In short, that for the Want of *These*, the most punctual Compliance with *outward and occasional Observances* (how commendable soever in itself) can by no means compensate. Numerous are the Passages to this Purpose, that occur especially in the *Prophetick Writings*; and a very remarkable one You will easily recollect from the *Beginning* of the *Evangelical Prophecy* to which I have so often refer'd. But I may content myself with citing only that which follows; the rather, as it comes almost immediately after, and gives a distinct Answer to, the Question in my *Text*. *'Behold the LORD's Hand is not shorten'd, that it cannot save; nor His Ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But Your Iniquities have separated between You and Your GOD; and Your Sins have hid His Face from You, that He will not hear.* A Declaration so express, as to want no Comment; but at the same Time of

^a Jer. V. 25.

^b Isai. I. 11—17.

^c Ibid. LIX. 1, 2.

such

such Moment, as cannot be consider'd with too much Attention, or with too much Impartiality apply'd, by Those, who have *for some Years* been imploring the Divine Aid and Protection.

II. How far *We of this Nation* are concern'd in *this* or *any* of the Cases before-mention'd; it may therefore now be seasonable for Us, in the *Second Place*, to enquire.

And here (that I may *begin* with that which was *first* suggested) I trust, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with, in regard to the *Justice*, or even the *Necessity*, of the *Wars*, in which we are at present engaged. The *Former* was not declared by us, 'till loudly call'd for by the united Voice of the whole People; after long Forbearance, and numberless Injuries received in a *Part*, wherein these Kingdoms must always be very sensibly affected. And, as to the *Latter*, our Case (I hope) is equally clear: *This* has lately been *forced* upon us by our restless Neighbours; who, as if resenting that we shou'd *pretend* to exceed them in Faithfulness to Engagements, which they enter'd into with equal Solemnity, and upon Terms *to them* far more advantageous; have presumed to threaten, not our Commerce only, but our Laws and Liberties, our *Government* and our *Holy Religion*. If there *can be* a justifiable Occasion for appealing to Heaven in the Use of Arms (as unquestionably there may) the necessary Defence of *all These* must certainly be allow'd to be *such* an Occasion. And if, in the Progress of a long and *complicated* War, any

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Doubt

Doubt should arise about *particular Incidents*; I see not what *Private Persons* (unacquainted as they may well suppose themselves to be with the *Whole* of such Transactions) can think more suited to their Station, than to refer *Cases* of this Kind to the Wisdom of the *Authorized Guardians* of our Publick Interests; whose serious Attention they will always (no doubt) highly deserve.

Which last Observation I would particularly apply to the *next* Article of Enquiry above hinted at, namely, the *Propriety of the Means* made Use of in the Prosecution of the War. — *These* must, in the Nature of Things, be *previously order'd* by some, and *put in Execution* by others, whose *Province* it is to superintend and conduct them. And, as to the Direction or Execution of them *when past*; I conceive, Persons at a *Distance* from publick Transactions, and in *no Capacity call'd upon* to pronounce any Thing concerning them, may fairly excuse themselves from *passing Sentence*, where they may be so easily mistaken. At least, it wou'd ill become *me* to detain You upon Enquiries of this Kind, on an Occasion *sacred* to quite other Purposes: Especially since, *which way soever* we shou'd find Cause to determine, it wou'd remain *equally* necessary for us to go thro' those other Heads of *Examination*, in which we are all of us far *more nearly* concern'd. Only let me not leave this Article without briefly observing; that there is a *Deference to Authority*, which Reason and the very Nature of Society require: That Persons engaged in arduous Employments are not on that
Account

'Account the less entitled to the same *Candour*, which our Religion recommends to us all in *judging* of each other's Designs and Actions: And that, were the *Apostolical* Rule of ' *Studying to be quiet, and to do their own Business*, more generally observed; perhaps *publick Order* would be no worse preserved; but certainly the *Minds* of *particular Persons* would be less apt to ' *disquiet themselves in vain, less ' careful and troubled about many Things*, to the fatal Neglect of (what is at least *comparatively* speaking) *the one Thing needful*. — But to proceed.

Fain would I persuade myself also, that we are competently clear with regard to the *Nature* and *Circumstances* of our past and present Fastings: that the *inward Seriousness*, Devotion, and Self-Abasement of our Humiliations have been in some Good Degree answerable to the *outward Decency* and Solemnity of them: that we have not been mocking GOD, by approaching His Throne with *Professions* of Confidence in His gracious Aid, whilst our chief *Trust* has been in *Chariots and Horses*, or in our own *Counsel and Strength* for the War: and lastly, that, instead of Rancour and Proneness to Strife, we have brought with us to these Religious Exercises the truly *Christian Graces* of mutual Love and Brotherly Kindness; *Hearts* open to the tender Impressions of Pity and Compassion, and *Hands* stretched forth to relieve the Distresses of our indigent Brethren. The *Report* to be made upon these Enquiries must indeed be left to every Man's own

a 1 Theff. IV. 11. b Psal. XXXIX. 6. c Luk. X. 41, 42.

Conscience. Only with regard to the *last*: tho' Instances there always have been, and too many there still may be, of cruel Oppression and **Grinding the Faces of the Poor*; yet (I trust) *Unmercifulness* is not a *National Vice* amongst us. Blessed be God! a truly commendable Spirit of Generosity and Munificence, of Readiness and even *Forwardness* to supply the Wants, and to administer Comfort to the Distresses, both of the Souls and Bodies of that Part of our Species which labours under them, has for some Time been exerting itself in the Promotion of many excellent Charities of various Kinds. And, had not our *Prayers been hinder'd* by any Thing of *another Nature*; we should probably already have experienced the happy *Influence* of our many *charitable Foundations*; and that, under the Blessing of Providence, *^bour Alms shut up in these Store-houses* (as the Son of *Sirach* expresth it) had *fought for us against our Enemies better than a mighty Shield and a strong Spear*.

But, alas! there yet remains *another Head* of *National Self-Examination*! and unless we shall appear to have *^cbroke off our Sins by Righteousness*, we must not wonder if they continue still unexpiated by, that otherwise best of our Sacrifices, *shewing Mercy to the Poor*. Let us then, with all Impartiality, ask ourselves, or in Pursuance of the present Appointment *permit me* to ask, *How far* our former Fasts have been attended by a *suitable Reformation* in the Instances at first complained of? and particularly, *What Improve-*

^a Isai. III, 15, ^b Eccles. XXIX. 12, 13, ^c Dan. IV, 27.
ment,

ment we have made in the Practice of *Religious, Personal, and Social Duties*, in the Course of these our repeated Humiliations?

To begin (where all our Views should be principally directed) with what relates to *the Glory of GOD*. — Is the *Name of GOD* more reverently used in common Discourse, or the Obligation of *Oaths* more inviolably observed, than formerly? Are *Persons and Things*, that have been dedicated to His immediate Service, regarded more suitably to the Relation in which they stand? Is His *Worship* more regularly kept up in *Private Families*; or more universally and more seriously attended in the *Great Congregation*? Is that *small Portion of Time* which He, to whom we owe the *whole* of it, was pleased from the Beginning to *consecrate* to Religious Uses, less commonly or less publicly *profaned* by Worldly Business or Pleasure? Are those *Scriptures which were given by Inspiration from Him*, and which contain an inestimable Treasure of *Direction and Comfort* to every serious Mind, less exposed to idle Cavil, to stupid Burlesque, to blasphemous Drollery? Are Writings avowedly attacking their *Divine Authority*, and tending in their *direct* Consequences to banish from the Minds of the People *all Religious Sentiments*, all Notions not only of a Redeemer and Sanctifier, but of a Providence, a Judge, and an Avenger, less industriously propagated by some, or with more Zeal discountenanced by others? — If this shall appear to be the Case, we may humbly hope, that the Almighty will, in his good Time, favourably
bear

** bear from the Heavens our Prayer and our Supplication, and maintain our Cause.* But, should the Reverse of all this be rather found true, His Disregard of our Fasts may *from hence* be but too easily accounted for. Vain and presumptuous must our most devout Humiliations *on one Day in the Year* certainly appear, should there be Cause to suspect, that *GOD is scarcely in all our Thoughts*, to any good Purpose, for the Remainder of it. Communities are not less concern'd than Individuals, in that awful Declaration —
They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.

Again: An *unreflecting* Levity of Mind, a prevailing *Luxury* and Fondness for *sensual Pleasures*, equally unsuitable to Men's Circumstances and inconsistent with their Duty; were at first complain'd of as National Disorders among us. And have *the People of this Land* in general since recover'd their *once famed Plainness*, Seriousness, and Regularity of Behaviour? Do we find Men of all Conditions grown more willing to *deny themselves* the Use not only of superfluous, but even *criminal Gratifications*? Has the Support of a consuming War made any visible Retrenchments from our former expensive Elegance in *Diversions*, as well as Dress and all the Articles of Living? Rather, do we not, in the Midst of our Complaints of encreasing Poverty, still continue to *compass Sea and Land*; ransacking all the Stores of Nature in order to furnish out *fresh Materials* for Pleasure, all the Inventions of Art in order to discover *new Kinds* of it? — The

a 2 Chr. VI. 35.

b 1 Sam. II. 30.

Answer to these Questions must be left to every one's Observation of what passes before him. But let us not flatter ourselves, that to *afflict our Soul only for a Day, to bow down the Head as a Bulrush, to spread Sackcloth and Ashes under us*; in short, to impose upon ourselves, for a few Hours, all the outward Tokens, or even all the real Offices, of Abstinence and Mortification, without Moderation in our Enjoyments, and a due Government over our Appetites, at other Times; will be admitted as a *Fast and an acceptable Day to the LORD*. Let us remember that tremendous Denunciation of the Prophet to a Free-thinking and Free-living People, — *"In that Day did the LORD of Hosts call to Weeping and to Mourning and to Baldness and to Girding with Sackcloth: And, behold! Joy and Gladness, slaying Oxen and killing Sheep, eating Flesh and drinking Wine, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we dye."* And it was revealed in mine Ears by the LORD of Hosts, saying, *Surely this Iniquity shall not be purged away from you till ye dye, saith the LORD GOD of Hosts!* But

Farther: With regard to the Relative Obligations subsisting between the Members of the Community. Has a Reverence for Government as the Ordinance of GOD, and for Governours as His Ministers, of late gain'd any Ground among the several subordinate Ranks of Men? Are the sacred Tyes of the Domestic Relation more religiously comply'd with? Is Justice and Fairness in Men's Dealings with each other more strictly

observed? Is *the Labourer* thought more *wor-
thy of his Hire* by the Person employing him,
or is *he* on his Part more *content with his Wa-
ges*? Are *Men in general* more easy under the
Allotments of Providence, more industrious in
their respective Callings, more punctual in *ren-
dering to all their Dues*? And, in Consequence,
Do *the Great* and the Opulent find *their Houses*
more safe from Fear, and their Persons from In-
sult and Outrage? Have we fewer *Complain-
ings in our Streets*; is *Violence* more rarely heard
in our Land, or *Wasting and Destruction* within
our Borders? — I wish every one's Observation
would enable him to give himself a pleasing Ac-
count of these Matters. But if, on the other
Hand, an *Impatience of Restraints* of any Kind,
and a *Contempt of all Order and Authority*, be a
notorious Part of the *Character* of the present
Generation: if the most audacious Violations of
all Laws, human as well as divine, are daily
committed, and make some of the *principal Oc-
currences* of our Times: if Men of Rank and
Fortune to their Sorrow find, that those Persons,
whom *their Practice* has for some Time been
teaching *not to fear GOD*, have at last, without
any such Instruction, learn'd *not to regard Man*
— May not such *Overflowings of Ungodliness*
justly *make us afraid*? Can we want a Reason,
wherefore we have fasted and GOD seeth not? Is
it possible even for Providence, without a *mira-
culous Interposition*, to save us? or, should God

a Luk. X. 7. and III. 14. b Rom. XIII. 7. c Job XX. 9.
d Psal. CXLIV. 14. e Isai. LX. 18. f Psal. XVIII. 3.

be pleased to deliver us from our *foreign* Enemies, must He not work as *mighty* a Deliverance, to rescue us *from ourselves*.

It were but too easy to proceed in *asking* (would to God it were equally agreeable to *answer*!) such Questions as these, with regard to the *visible* State of Religion and Morals among us. And yet there remains still farther very important Matter for Enquiry; I mean, those *Personal* Sins, those *Plagues of our own Hearts*, which each of us is particularly call'd upon to search into and deplore; especially when, on such Occasions as this, we *spread forth our Hands in the House of GOD*. These, when fairly brought to Account, and added to our many *National* Transgressions, may too justly fill us with *Shame and Confusion of Face*: and make us, instead of expostulating with God for the little Notice He has taken of our former Humiliations, cry out in the pensive Strains of the *lamenting Prophet*, *It is of the LORD's Mercies that we are not consumed, because His Compassions fail not!*

Happy for us, that His *Compassions do not fail!* Let us then, upon the Encouragement arising from this Reflection, go on to enquire;

III. *Thirdly*, What remains *to be done on our Part*, in order more successfully to recommend ourselves to the Divine Favour and Blessing for the Future?

And, after what has been said, it may be proper to observe, in the *First Place*, that the *seem-*

1 Kin. VIII. 38. *b Lam. III. 22.*

ing Unsuccessfulness of our former Humiliations must by no means discourage us from *continuing* the same earnest Applications to the *GOD* of *Heaven*; which, tho' *of themselves insufficient*, will however always be *necessary*, to engage His Protection and Favour.

As there is no Perfection, in the Exercise and Display of which God has thought fit to express a greater *Delight*, than that of Mercy and *Loving Kindness*; so there is scarce any Provocation, of which He has in stronger Terms express'd His Resentment, than that of a *desponding* or *prophane* Distrust of this His glorious Attribute. Hear the remarkable Words of the Prophet *Jeremiah*; * *Ask ye now among the Heathen, who hath heard such Things? the Virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible Thing.* But what could give Occasion to a Charge so unusually aggravated? Why, it seems, when God had said, *Behold I frame Evil against you, and devise a Device against you: return ye now every one from his evil Way, and make your Ways and your Doings good*: the perverse Use they made of so gracious a Warning was this: *They said, There is no Hope: but we will walk after our own Devices, and we will every one do the Imagination of his evil Heart.* Far be it from us, to draw any such abominable Inference from God's Threatnings, or from the little Knowledge He may seem to have taken of our former Addresses to Him. Let us remember His severe Expostulation with His own People by the Prophet *Malachi*; * *Your*

* Jer. XVIII. 11, 12, 13. b Mal. III. 13, 14.

Words have been stout against me, saith the LORD of Hosts. But, what had they spoken so much against Him? The Answer we have in the next Verse; They had said, it is vain to serve GOD; and what Profit is it that we have kept his Ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of Hosts? — We see, the Almighty expects (as most justly He may) that Nations should wait his Time for the Grant of their Petitions; and is not less displeased with their Distrust of His Goodness and Power, than with their Confidence in their own.

Our Blessed LORD has taught *us Christians*, both from His own Practice and by His Instructions, to hope for those gracious Answers to our *re-iterated Requests*, which are not granted to our *first Addresses* for them. His Behaviour towards *the Woman of Canaan* is remarkable to this Purpose. For the Tryal of her Faith, and Commendation of it to his Followers, even the merciful JESUS could put on the Appearance of Deafness to her Entreaties, and for some Time hold out against her piercing Cries for *Mercy to her Daughter*. But when she, not satisfy'd first with his seemingly disdainful Silence, and then with his cold Replies and forbidding Evasions, again and again *renews* her Intercessions; at length, as if overcome by her Perseverance, He cries out, *O Woman, great is thy Faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt*. After this, I need hardly illustrate the same Point from *the Parable of the Friend importuned to lend three Loaves*,

a Matt. XV. 12—28.

b Luc. XI. 5—14.

or that of the *unjust Judge*; the former of which He directly applies to encourage *repeated Asking after repeated Refusals*; and introduces the latter to this very End, that Men ought always to pray and not to faint.

Now what are we to collect from all this? Certainly not that a Being of infinite Perfection has *Occasion* to be reminded of our Wants, or takes *Delight* in keeping us in *Suspence* about the Supply of them, meerly for the Sake of doing so; least of all, that he is capable of being *wearied* into Compassion by our Importunity and *much Speaking*. No. But God hath wise and gracious Ends to serve by this Method of Proceeding: perhaps to abate the Pride and mortify the Self-sufficiency of vain Men; perhaps to exercise their Faith and Trust in His Goodness, and to cherish in them a just Sense of their entire Dependence on his Providence; perhaps to render His Blessings, when He shall at length think fit to grant them, more justly valued, more thankfully received, and more discreetly enjoy'd, by them. — And, to bring these Reflections *nearer to ourselves*: Probably at our Entrance upon the War, our Hearts were not sufficiently humbled into a due Sense of our own Sinfulness and Unworthiness; or of our Weakness in ourselves, and absolute Want of a superior Aid: And, had our first Humiliations been *more visibly* regarded by God, and our first Addresses to Him answer'd by an *immediate* Grant of Victory and Peace; we might have been but too forward (as I fear

we were in some smaller Instances) to grow *elated* with Successes so easily obtained, and to ascribe them *wholly* to our own Bravery, Wisdom, or Power. But, if we have since *learn'd Obedience, by the Things we have suffer'd* or without the Divine Help soon may suffer: if this present Humiliation has been perform'd by us with a suitable Devotion and Fervency; with a due Degree of Lowliness of Mind, and Dependence upon God; with undissembled Love to each other, and charitable Relief to our distress'd Brethren: Who can tell, whether God may not have been *'waiting that He might be Gracious?* Whether He may not, even now, be giving Directions to the Ministers of his Pleasure, *'to turn our Heaviness into Joy, to put off our Sackcloth and gird us with Gladness?*

However, to render our Hopes of this Kind in any Degree reasonable, our Fastings must be accompany'd by a *sincere Abhorrence* of past *Transgressions*, and succeeded by an *entire Turning away* from them for the Future. Be *this* then our *Next Care*: Because *'without this, our Oblations will be vain, and our Incense an Abomination; nay our Calling of Assemblies will itself be Iniquity, even this Solemn Meeting.*

What those Provocations may be, which we of this Land are particularly call'd upon to lament and forsake, I shall not attempt farther to specify. But it concerns us all to remember, that *National Reformation must first begin with Perso-*

a Isai. XXX. 18.

b Psal. XXX. 11.

c Isai. I. 13.

nal Amendment. Let none of us then so mourn for the many crying Sins of *the Nation*, as to forget how much may have been contributed to the general Load by the Guilt of *his own*. Let our Zeal *first* exert itself in an impartial Scrutiny *here*. And, when by an unfeigned Sorrow, and humble Applications to the God of Mercy, we have set all right *within us*; it will then highly become us to look abroad; and each of us, in proportion to the Demands of his Station and the Extent of his Influence, to assist in promoting the Amendment of those about him. — From *Persons in Authority* much may be hoped for, if they ^a *bear not the Sword in vain*; if they employ the Power wherewith they are entrusted, ^b *for the Punishment of Evil-Doers* as well as *for the Praise of them that do well*. — Much will likewise be expected from *Ministers of the Gospel*, especially with regard to the Souls committed to their Charge; to whom it is incumbent on them, as the ^c *appointed Watchmen*, to give Warning on every just Apprehension of Danger. — *Most of us* may do more than can perhaps easily be estimated, by Example, by Advice, by Exhortation, by Admonition, and (on Occasions requiring it) by friendly Reproof. — Nor let the *Younger Part* of my present Hearers think themselves unconcern'd in this important Work. “*To You much is given*: Whilst many, of the same *Nature*, and at the same *Season of Life*, with Your's, are employ'd in laborious and *servile* Offices, probably for *Your sakes*; whilst many others are al-

^a Rom. XIII. 4. ^b 1 Pet. II. 14. ^c Ezek. XXXIII. 7, &c.
most

most wholly left to the Conduct of (those worst of Guides) their own *Youthful Lusts*; Ye are not only blest'd with Leisure and Opportunities for *learning the Way of Your Duty more perfectly*, but may be mightily assisted by Your very Situation, in contracting early Habits of Self-Government, of Decency and Exemplariness in Behaviour; *Habits*, which if carry'd abroad with You into the World (bad as it is) may yet enable You to do no inconsiderable Service to the Cause of Reformation. And need I observe to You, how reasonably Your *less happy* Countrymen may expect from You, that Ye should *communicate* to them in *this* Way (the only Way in which they *can* partake of it) the invaluable Benefit of a regular Education; by *showing Yourselves* unto them, in all Things, *Patterns of Good Works?*"

In short: Something we may, *every one of us*, do towards the general Good, by reforming ourselves; by a faithful Discharge of our respective Duties; but especially, by our Prayers to Almighty God. For we may with some Comfort remember, that at the *Patriarch's* Intercession, even *Sodom* ^b *had been spared*, could only *Ten Righteous Persons have been found there*. Let none of us then be dishearten'd. Vice and Wickedness are indeed forward and daring; and *particular* Instances of them make much Noise in the World: And it must be confess'd to be a Circumstance not a little discouraging to the Friends of Virtue, that too many, whom we would *charitably* believe Well-wishers to the same good

a Tit. II. 7.

b Gen. XVIII. 32.

Cause, do yet greatly obstruct it; not only by a *Pharisaical Ostentation* of their own superior Holiness; but by spreading among the People *perplexing Notions* and *dangerous Explications* of some very important Points; and by *raising Accusations* against those, whose *Province* and *Desire* it is to instruct them with *Words of Truth and Sobriety*. But still, We humbly hope, GOD reserves to himself many *Thousands* equally free from Licentiousness on one hand, and Enthusiasm on the other; And by His Blessing, under all Disadvantages, the *Light* of an undissembled Worth, *shining before Men*, with Candour and at the same Time with Steadiness, in the Practice of good Works, may engage yet More, by a just Imitation, to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

Vain, however, will all our Attempts towards *National Reformation* be, unless the *Foundation* be laid in *National Piety*; in the powerful Principles of Conscience, the prevailing Motives of Religion. Let it then be our *Farther Care*, first to cherish within ourselves, and then as we have Opportunity to promote in others, that *Fear of the LORD*, which is, in regard to Societies as well as Individuals, the *Beginning of Wisdom*.

Religious Principles will ever be the best Supports of any Community, either in Peace or War. They engage all Orders of Men in the Performance of those Offices, by which its *Prosperity must be upheld*: They inspire its *Governours*, both supreme and subordinate, with Fi-

delity to their great Trust; its *Armies* with Courage in the Day of Battle; its *People* with Loyalty and Chearfulness in discharging the Duties of their respective Stations: Above all, they most powerfully solícite the Protection and Favour of Almighty GOD: and, that once secured, *'tho' an Host of Men be laid against us, yet need not our Heart be afraid; and tho' there rise up War against us, yet may we put our Trust in Him.*

Should I, in View of some * late alarming Circumstances, go on to recommend an Affection for any particular *Etablissement* of Religion; such an Expedient for keeping out *Popery* might perhaps by Some be thought a *preposterous* one: Those I mean, who imagine, or pretend to imagine, that wheresoever Religious Establishments are supported, *the Work of Popery*, or something at least *as bad* as Popery, is effectually carry'd on; and who seem to think, there can be no *consistent Protestantism*, unless all Tenets in Religion be *equally* allow'd and (if that be indeed *practicable*) *equally* encourag'd; with this only Reserve, that they be *not Popish* ones. I am, notwithstanding, perswaded, that the only effectual *Human Means* for supporting the Reform'd Religion in this Kingdom, must be an *Etablish-*

a Psalm XXVII. 3.

* The *Danger* here meant was *That* of an *Invasion*, from the Enemies of our Religion and Government, which had alarm'd us in the Beginning of the Year 1744. But the following Reflections appear'd to have been the more seasonable, when a *Second Attempt* from the same Quarter, in Conjunction with a *Rebellion*, more *nearly* threaten'd us, in less than a Year after *This* was preached and published.

E

ment

ment of some determinate Scheme of it, with some Degree of Zeal for it thro'out the several Orders of Men. And (all unseasonable Contention apart) I trust, we shall adhere to *that* we are in Possession of, 'till a *better* shall be proposed; or one, which has (under God) been *more instrumental in saving us* from some former Attempts of the same Enemy.

It has, we know, been the Policy of some among us, after endeavouring to discharge the *Civil Magistrate* from *all Care* of Religion, to bring the *People* into a State of as much *Indifference* as possible about any *particular Forms* of it: in order (as we may suppose) to rescue them from an Influence, which these Persons seem never to talk or think of with any Patience. One would imagine, however, that our *late Fears* might (if Nothing else should) dispose Men to consider, Whether this Matter has not *already* been carry'd as far as will well consist with the *Publick Safety*? Had our *Fathers*, on an ever-memorable Occasion just hinted at, been as little concern'd about *Modes of Faith*, *Forms of Polity*, or *Rites of Worship*, as Some have of late Years been perswading *Us* to be; I think, it cannot be hard to determine, in what Condition not only our *Religious* but our *Civil Liberties* had been long before this Time. And, should God, for our Sins, suffer the Danger, with which we were lately threaten'd, to approach *still nearer* to us; the Enemies of our *Country* could scarce hope to find an *impoverish'd* People (perhaps but too easily taught to call the *Incumbrances*, they at
any

any Time feel, by the Name of *Grievances*) in a Temper better suited to *their* pernicious Purposes, than *that* of *Lukewarmness* towards the Religion they now profess; or in a Situation more promising, than *that* of an entire *Detachment* from any *Influence*, which its appointed Teachers could have over them.

The Truth is, should Men once take up the Persuasion, that not only the Instructors, but the Institutions, in *all Religions are the same*; they could have little Scruple, upon a suitable Temptation offer'd, against becoming Profelytes to *any*: Nor might those, who should be *really willing*, have it in their *Power*, to make the *Romish Religion* an *Exception* in this Case. If its *Absurdities* and *Idolatries* must shock the Rational and Thoughtful Part of the Nation; and if the Humane and Good-natured must be startled (as well they may) at the great *Barbarities* formerly exercised, and the yet greater attempted, by its Professors in these Kingdoms: Yet let it be remember'd, that it has much *Pomp* and *Pageantry* in its Worship to attract the Lover of State and Magnificence; It *pretends* to have *Infallible* Guidance for the Doubtful, and secure *Repose* for the Unsettled; It offers *Indulgences* to the Libertine, and deals out *Pardons* to the Debauch'd, on very easy Terms: And to how considerable a Part of our People, when once set loose from the Principles in which they have been educated, It might soon address itself, under one or other of these Characters, in a Conjunction of *real Danger*; I think, every *Lover*
of

of his Country (could we urge no *higher* Motive) might do well to consider.

Whereas, on the other Hand, whilst the Body of the Nation generally retain a Zeal for the Honour of God, and for His *pure Religion* establish'd among us; their Affection for a Prince, who has hitherto preserved, and has often declared His unalterable Resolution to preserve, this great Blessing to them, will not (I trust) easily be shaken: And *We* may go on with Chearfulness and Success to *put them in Mind*, upon every proper Occasion, *to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates*. Indeed, Men who *fear the LORD* can never want an Argument for *reverencing the King*, scarce ever an Objection against *meddling with those that are given to Change*. Difference of Sentiments about Publick Affairs, or perhaps some Degree of Jealousy against Encroachments upon Liberty, seems to be the Natural Result of National Freedom: And even Opposition to Proceedings thought irregular and dangerous, when exerted by *proper Persons*, and in *Methods warranted* by the Laws of God and Man, may sometimes, under the Direction of Providence, be of considerable Use in preserving it. But still; every *truly conscientious* Man will, *at least*, insist on having some *very important Questions* (which I need not here suggest) fully resolved, before He will allow himself to enter into Schemes of *Subversion* against the Government that *protects* him, and to which he has *bound himself* by the most *awful Engage-*

a Tit. III. 1.

b Prov. XXIV. 21.

ments. And, in particular, a *Popish Prince* can never be a *welcome Visitant* to a People well-acquainted with the Principles, and well-affected to the Constitution, of the *Church of England*.

Upon the Whole: If *Righteousness exalteth a Nation*; if *Sin be the Reproach*, and must, when *persisted in*, be the Ruin, of any People: 'tis as certain, that *National Piety*, will ever be necessary to secure a due Cultivation of the one, or a timely Reformation from the other. But in vain shall we hope to preserve *National Piety* without a *National Church*; or to support either of them, *humanly speaking*, without a *National Establishment*. And, as long as the *Reformed Religion*, and every Blessing connected with it, shall be thought worthy of our Concern; so long it will be our Wisdom to *bold fast the form of sound Words* as we have been taught; and to *worship the LORD*, as we now enjoy the happy Opportunity of worshipping Him, *in the Beauty of Holiness*.

But to return and conclude. — May we all, with that Seriousness, which the Occasion calls for, *search and try our Ways, and turn to the LORD!* May every one of us, before we depart from this devout Exercise, resolve to *cast away all his Transgressions whereby he has transgressed*; and, in proportion to his Influence and Opportunities to help forward the Reformation of others! And, as the most effectual Engagement to this great Work, may we (according to

a Prov. XIV. 34.
d Lam. III. 46.

b 2 Tim. I. 3.
e Ezek. XVIII. 31.

c Psal. XCVI. 9.

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